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DEMOCRATS INTRODUCE COMPREHENSIVE PROPOSAL TO HONOR AMERICA'S SERVICE PERSONNEL

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today joined Democrats in announcing a comprehensive bill to honor American soldiers, past and present, and their families.[] [] []

The Democratic bill rolls back health care cost increases imposed by the Bush Administration and the Republican Congress, expands health care access for veterans and educational opportunities for reservists, and provides cash bonuses to soldiers serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.[] In addition, families of those killed on active duty would receive higher benefits under the Democratic proposal.

"Veterans, like many hard working Americans, are getting squeezed in the Bush economy and by a federal budget that is being used to pay for tax breaks for millionaires instead of meeting their critical needs," Schakowsky said.[] [] []

"How can President Bush stand on the deck of an aircraft carrier and praise our troops while at the same time cutting billions from veterans' health care and forcing military retirees to pay more for their prescription drugs? Veterans deserve better," continued Schakowsky, who added that the current Republican budget calls for cutting veterans' health care by \$6.2 billion over the next ten years.

The Democratic proposal would:

- Eliminate increases in prescription drug co-payments and block the new \$250 enrollment fees proposed by the Bush Administration and included in the Republican budget resolution.**
- Reduce time to receive care at VA facilities by requiring the VA to make appointments within 14 days (200,000 veterans must wait 6 months or more for their first appointment at a VA facility).**
- Require interim payments of \$500 a month when disability claims have not been decided within 180 days.**
- Allow veterans to receive both retirement and disability payments.**
- Increase education benefits for members of the Reserve or National Guard to keep**

pace with improvements in the GI Bill

- End the unfair policy that reduces at age 62 the benefits received by the spouses of military retirees or those killed in action**
- Provide a \$1000 bonus to nearly 500,000 soldiers who served in imminent danger status in Afghanistan and Iraq.**

"I am proud to stand with my Democratic colleagues to say that no veteran should have to pay with their health so that President Bush can deliver billions of more dollars to his richest supporters.□ For the sake of military retirees, the families of those who gave their lives defending our country, and the men and women in battle today, we will pass this bill and deliver on our promise.□ Our mission is clear and just," Schakowsky added.